

YOUR VACATION CHECKLIST

HELLO NEIGHBOR

- Put newspaper delivery on hold and have mail held at the post office, or ask a neighbor to retrieve.
- Ask a neighbor to pick up fliers hung on your door or tossed on the lawn -- sure signs that you're away.
- Ask a neighbor to take in or protect yard furniture if there's bad weather.

OUTSIDE THE HOUSE

- Arrange for lawn care. Overgrown grass is a giveaway that you're on vacation
- Put outdoor lights on timers to illuminate walkways and entrances.
- Leave the pool pump on, though it may need to run less frequently if no one is using the pool
- If you're going to be away more than 10 days, have someone check the pool and service it if necessary. You don't want to come back to the black lagoon.
- Trim dead branches and overhanging limbs. You should do this anyway during storm season, but it's especially important to eliminate sources of damage while you're away.

UNDER LOCK AND KEY

- Lock up valuables in a safe-deposit box, or consider buying a safe, installable in a closet. Back up your computer's hard drive onto a small external drive and store it in a safe-deposit box.
- Close blinds and drapes from peering eyes keen on spying that plasma TV.
- Notify your alarm service that you'll be away, making sure they've got your cellphone number, and activate the alarm when you leave.
- Close and lock all windows and doors, especially doors you don't routinely lock, like the door between the house and the garage.
- Lock freestanding garages, sheds and other outbuildings.
- Padlock gates. Make it hard for burglars to get in and just as hard to get out with your stuff
- Disconnect your garage door's remote opening device and lock the door.
- Put a couple of lights on timers. Schedule them to go on and off at random hours or it will look like you're using timers. Test a day or two before to make sure they're turning on when you want them to.

POWER

- Unplug the computer and other electronics. A fried home-entertainment system is not a good thing. Disconnect phone and cable wires. If you're not leaving the air-conditioning on, keep your computer in as cool a place as possible
- Turn the air-conditioning thermostat up to between 81 and 85 degrees. If you have a programmable device, set it to run for about two hours at the coolest time of the day, between 3 and 5 a.m. That keeps humidity at bay.

ONE LAST THING

- The same type of home inventory you prepare in case of weather-related damage can help if your home is burglarized. Videotape or photograph each room and all valuable items. Prepare a list including cost, serial numbers and date of purchase along with receipts. Keep this somewhere outside the house.